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ABSTRACT

The paper reviews the design of a model for teaching about work in social studies. Developed in 1974 at an inservice economic education workshop sponsored by the Illinois Council on Economic Education, The World of Work Economic Education Program orients existing curriculum materials around fundamental economic principles. It was hypothesized that work and social studies are related and that social studies teachers should incorporate work issues into the curriculum because their relevance to students would help offset declining interest in social studies courses. Objections to teaching about work in social studies are discussed. For example, it is alledged that work-related topics are unrelated to social studies, faddish, time-consuming, too theoretical, less important than other topics, and difficult to present. Project teachers developed curriculum materials, gave pre- and posttests to more than 5,000 students, and kept diaries in which they evaluated students' economic understandings. Test results indicated that students exposed to the model curriculum learned significantly more about economic concepts than students who did not follow the curriculum. The conclusion is that students are interested in work-related subjects and can be taught about work and other economic concepts. The World of Work Economic Education Program is a mini-course which achieves this objective. (Author/DB)

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# WORK IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES:
## A Preliminary Review

by

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and John C. Soper

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# WORK IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: A PRELIMINARY REVIEW

By Michael A. MacDowell,
Peter R. Senn, and John C. Soper

At a recent conference supported by the National Science Foundation, Dr. Charles Billings said, "Many educators have reservations about teaching work oriented materials in the social studies." Subsequent discussion and examination of the literature on the subject revealed several objections that thoughtful social studies teachers have about using work related materials.

Now, however, social studies educators face a number of circumstances which suggest a re-examination of concerns. Among these are competition for students from other fields of study, the call for accountability, charges of social studies irrelevance and the undoubted fact that in many places social studies is becoming less popular with students. Perhaps it is therefore appropriate for social studies educators to take a new look at the whole question. Assisted by grants from the National Science Foundation and others, educators in Illinois have done this. What follows is an account of the objections raised to teaching about work in the social studies and how some of us in Illinois attempted to answer these objections.

Objections to teaching about work in the field of social studies appear to fall into six main groups. It is alleged that:

1. Teaching about work is not related to the field of social studies.
2. Educators, curriculum developers, and textbook writers lack a theory of how children develop their concepts about work.
3. Teaching about work is faddish, becoming popular only because funds have recently been available for this kind of education. Related to this is the fact that there are not enough interesting academically sound and well-tested materials available.
4. Teachers in social studies don't have enough time now for what they want to do, and they don't want to add a new course, or much new material.



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5. Other things are more important to teach students about than work.
6. This is another curriculum imposed from the top with little teacher input or regard for the student, and like many other social studies curriculum materials won't work well in the classroom.

Leading educators, such as Dr. James Niss, Dr. Kalman Goldberg and Dr. Donald Paden, working with teachers and curriculum specialists and the authors of this article, under the auspices of the Illinois Council on Economic Education, explored each of these objections. You will be able to judge for yourself how successfully they were able to respond to them by what follows.

## How Work and the Social Studies are Related

Work and social studies are related in two fundamental ways. One is theoretical and the other applied. Hardly a one of the basic seven social sciences does not have important and explicit parts of the discipline related to work. Almost everyone thinks of economics in this connection, but sometimes they tend to forget, unless they are Marxist, that work has a history, and whole philosophies of history are based on work and its relationships to other social institutions. Almost everybody remembers that psychologists and sociologists study work and its meanings but they tend to forget that much of geography is also related to the study of work, although remembering about transportation routes, and the location of industries and farms soon changes this. Anthropologists regard work as so important that hardly an ethnographic study is made without paying significant attention to the work in the society being studied. Need we mention that political science studies both the laws and the processes by which the laws are made which set minimum wages and determine working conditions and age limits? These laws, in turn, discourage most of our students from working while they are still in high school. The objection, therefore, that the study of work is not part of the social sciences is

without substantial merit.

In a sense, the applied relationship between work and social studies is even more misunderstood. Because many people, especially legislators, do not understand social science, a sharp but unfortunate division exists in American education between teaching about work and the social studies. This division is exemplified in the differentiation made between vocational training or career courses and the social studies expecially when the vocational training simply emphasizes such skills as those of an auto mechanic or typist. But in a world where workers will probably have to change their occupations at least once and where the very meaning of work is changing, students who are exposed only to narrow skills specialties are being done a disservice. Dr. Lawrence Senesh recognized this more than a decade ago in one of the earliest and most successful developments in the new social studies of the 1960's, entitled Our Working World. Many other examples of using the theoretical material from the social sciences to educate about work in the social studies could be given. These examples would show that on the applied level of classroom teaching, work and the social studies can be closely related.

## Theories of Concept Development

It appears to be true, however, that no well established educational theory exists for the development of a child's concepts of work. We have no models like those of Piaget for conceptual development of Kohlberg for moral development. This theoretical objection, however, is not fatal. For with the exception of those mentioned and a very few others, the entire field of social studies suffers from a similar lack. Even the existing models and theories of development are not well established and are subject to controversy. But this does not mean that we can or should stop teaching social studies. It only means that we could do a much better job if we had well-tested and appropriate models and theories.

In an attempt to remedy this lack, the Illinois group of college and school level educators is working on the development of an appropriate theory of the growth of a child's attitude toward work. By no means complete, the study has isolated seven prinicpal dimensions of work, each of which has different meanings for children at different stages of development. The seven meanings of work are activities designed to:

1. Produce income and benefits.
2. Occupy oneself in an interesting way.
3. Maintain or increase social status.
4. Have satisfactory social interaction.
5. Give oneself a sense of identity.
6. Supply goods or services.
7. Be creative or self-fulfilling.[1]

We anticipate that as teaching about work in the social studies increases, the theoretical gaps we have been discussing will decrease.

The other four objections to teaching about work in the social studies were mostly practical. The educators concerned with these problems attempted to resolve them in the model for implementation and dissemination that they developed.

## The Illinois Model

Without going too far back into the history, it all began more than a decade ago in May of 1964 when, as a result of pressures and interest from the U. S. Department of Labor and the Joint Council on Economic Education, an economic education institute focusing on work was held in Athens, Ohio. Requests from classroom teachers, school superintendents and leaders from the business, labor, and farm communities as well as government made it apparent that there was need for someone to develop curriculum materials which might help students understand the dramatic

changes taking place in the world of work. The United States Office of Education under the Vocational Education Act of 1963 gave a grant to Ohio University's Center for Economic Education for the creation of the Manpower Development: Opportunities In American Economic Life (to later be titled Manpower Economic Education) curriculum between 1966 and 1968. The curriculum was designed to help bridge the gap between education and work by helping students understand such themes as the structure of the United States economy, changes brought about by technology, the changing role of work, and how market processes, occupational opportunities and decision-making skills were related. The curriculum attempted through an interdisciplinary base to cut across and integrate many of the social sciences, for example, by providing an examination of the economic, psychological and sociological implications of career choices.

By the spring of 1974, pressures from teachers and educators led the Illinois Council on Economic Education to sponsor an in-service World of Work Economic Education Workshop. The social studies teachers at that workshop, even the ones who had previously thought teaching about work in the social studies was faddish and that there wasn't enough material, were surprised by the amount and quality of what was available for the classroom. They asked the Illinois Council to request funds from the National Science Foundation so that a full scale implementation and dissemination program could be developed.

When this support became available, the Illinois Model was developed. The Model was designed to be widely applicable and because it differs in several significant respects from those used for implementation and dissemination elsewhere, it is worth describing here.

Over one-hundred teachers from twenty-one school districts were allowed to join the program. They came from all over the State of Illinois and worked through the Centers for Economic Education at the following universities: Northern Illinois;

Western Illinois; Bradley; and DePaul University. The directors of these university centers were the backbone of the project staff.

The teachers were divided into two groups: one, designated "key disseminators", who were master teachers, would develop the materials and supervise the work of the other group of teachers, called the "implementers."

One of the unique features of the Illinois Model is the far-reaching and deep involvement of teachers in every stage of implementation and dissemination. It is interesting that, in the anonymous evaluation forms the teachers prepared, there were no complaints about the imposition of curriculum materials.

Very early in the project, the teachers decided that, rather than adding a new course, they preferred to improve the quality of their existing offerings. This approach avoided direct confrontation with the objection that teaching other things was more important. It also got around the objection of not having enough time to do what they wanted to do. The teachers decided what they wanted to do. Like almost every good teacher, they had strong feelings about which parts of their social studies offerings were dull, dated, or otherwise needed strengthening. Thus they were interested in "infusing" the World of Work Economic Education program into their curriculum.

In a related decision, the teachers also decided to integrate specific work concepts into existing curricula. In other words, the courses the teachers were presently teaching would be the horses that the work concepts would ride. Most of the social studies teachers in the program taught a U.S. History course. They decided to build their classroom materials around a list of economic concepts that would allow them to teach the present materials, but with a new and stronger emphasis on fundamental economic concepts related to specific events, topics, or decisions in United States history. The fundamental concept that linked teaching about work to U. S. History was that rational career decisions must be based on knowledge of the

American economic system. Accepting this idea meant teaching the present materials with more basic economic principles applied to each historic event or period.

Another key feature of the Illinois Model was the close relationship between the teachers and the universities. The key disseminators from all over the state met at the DeKalb campus of Northern Illinois University to become acquainted with the World of Work Economic Education materials and the program. After meeting at the beginning of the summer of 1974, the master teachers took home with them the World of Work Economic Education materials in order to prepare classroom ready programs based on their own needs. They returned later in the summer of 1974 with the implementers, that is to say, the teachers with whom they would be working. At that session the materials they developed were evaluated by the staff and modified where necessary.

All of the teachers were then enrolled in another graduate course giving three credit hours, but lasting from August 1974 through June of 1975. Among the requirements for this course were that they all would agree to teach the materials and both pre- and post-test not only the students to whom they would be teaching the material, but also a control group of students who should not be taught the materials.

Thus the stage was set for one of the largest implementation and dissemination projects with quantitative and normed evaluation in the history of American social studies. The project was unique in several ways but perhaps most importantly in the fact that it involved more than five thousand students, experimental and control groups, and pre- and post-testing. All of the teachers involved agreed to give the affective instrument, "Were I a Worker," and the cognitive nationally normed test, "The Junior High School Test of Economics."

In addition to the quantitative evaluation, the teachers also kept diaries for qualitative evaluation. The teachers enrolled for the fall and winter course set aside five full days for workshops and discussion, plus a series of lectures. The fall semester of 1974 marked the beginning of a state-wide effort at improvement in social studies education.

## How It All Worked Out

Despite the wide variety of teachers, students, and materials taught, it was assumed that the students would improve their economic understanding as measured by the cognitive test instrument. This was because the teachers focused on work and a selected list of economic concepts.

In the cognitive evaluation of the WOWEE project, we relied on the Junior High School Test of Economics (hence forth JHSTE), a nationally-normed, validated instrument designed for testing content acquisition at grade levels 7 through 9. The use of this instrument posed some problems, however. The major problem is the content validity of the test. At most, 21 of the 40 items on the test correspond to the WOWEE concepts addressed in the program.

Table 1 compares the national norms for the JHSTE with the pretest norms of the first block of WOWEE students tested.

TABLE 1: National and WOWEE Pretest Statistics

| | National Sample | First WOWEE Block |
|---|---|---|
| $\overline{X}$ | 19.12 | 19.78 |
| $\sigma$ | 6.17 | 6.04 |
| n | 8,618 | 900 |
| grades | 9 | 7-9 |

The distinction between experimental and control classes in the WOWEE pretest was not statistically significant.

Table 2 displays the posttest results for the WOWEE students, broken down by experimental and control groups.

TABLE 2: WOWEE Group Posttest Statistics

| | Experimental | Control |
|---|---|---|
| $\bar{x}$ | 23.185 | 21.464 |
| $\sigma$ | 6.95 | 6.39 |
| n | 597 | 303 |

These results indicate that the experimental students scored an absolute gain (post score - pre score) of 3.554 points, while the control group scored, on average, a 1.388 point gain. The control group "learned" some economics even though they were not (in general) exposed to the WOWEE curriculum, probably due to maturation and incidental learning. In any event, the control group's "learning" is not statistically significant, although that of the experimental group's is highly significant.

Some other interesting findings were that the students of the key disseminators, those who prepared the material for the classrooms and supervised the other teachers, learned on the average about the same as all the students. This indicates an efficient teacher-training technique for intensive summer training can be reserved for a cadre of the teacher-instructors who in turn train their peers during less expensive school year workshops which do not involve release time. Still another interesting finding was that the control groups, those students who were taught nothing about economics learned in amounts that were not statistically significant.

The results are not so clear with respect to affective change. What was sought was some measure of how attitudes toward work might be influenced by knowing more about it. Unfortunately, the test instrument we used was not quite what we required. This is not to criticize it unduly. There are no nationally normed, reliable and

valid instruments for measuring attitudes toward work. This is both a cause and a result of the lack of theoretical understanding mentioned earlier. An article in another journal will describe this part of the research in more detail.

One of the reasons so little research is done in the actual classroom teaching situation is that such research is very difficult. In the pretesting and posttesting alone, the teachers had to give up about four hours of class time. In addition, they had to make sure that the students took a great deal of care, in filling out answer sheets, properly coding the form and the like. But most teachers did the job very well. As a result these teachers now know or can find out exactly how their students compare with a large sample of students in the State of Illinois. They can compare their teaching effectiveness with that of other teachers on both a state and national scale. And they know exactly where they need to improve, if that is their desire.

Too much praise cannot be given to the teachers. Of course it was their project but it takes much intellectual courage for a teacher to pretest and posttest students to find exactly what they learned and did not learn. That is the reason so many teachers and their organizations fight pretest and posttesting. It casts a blinding light on what is going on in the classrooms. Fortunately the teachers who worked with us had this intellectual courage, and both they and their students will be better for it.

## The Adaptability of the Model

No model for curriculum change can work in the long run if it is not flexible enough to allow for coping with problems in specific classrooms. The qualitative evaluations provided by the teachers' diaries allowed us to recognize problems early. Following are samples from the diaries and how we reacted to them. They are given as examples of the pragmatic approach the model uses and to show that it could be adopted in many different teaching situations.

Because we were not able to get the posttests back to the students before the end of the semester, one teacher said, "My only disappointment, so far, is that I have not received the results of either the pre or posttests. It has been discouraging to both my students and myself." This year, two solutions will be given for the problem. If the teacher wants immediate feedback, he or she will be given the key and will grade the test. Arrangements also have been made with the computer center to return the results more rapidly.

Another teacher, writing about the affective part of the test teaches in a suburb, medium income, but with a good school system. "Took the job choice half of the pretest. Took about 30 minutes. Test seems quite senseless to students and is very poor mechanically." This year the test will be changed to eliminate these objections.

A black teacher in a black high school entered the following notes in her diary. "The students in the experimental program were classified as honors but I found them in many instances to be eudcationally very immature and not particularly good readers which made teaching economics to them difficult. Finally I had to resort to case studies and lots of charts and worksheets."

"I do not think a ten week mini-program should be launched in the middle of the year. As a teacher I would prefer to know my students better so that I might use materials on their level." Many more activities, materials, and other resources have been added to the hundreds of pages of classroom-ready worksheets, lesson plans, and unit outlines with which each teacher is provided. No book is any longer required, although the teacher can use one if desired.

Many teachers gave their own pre and posttests in addition to the ones given by all the teachers. Although there was much reluctance about this matter on the part of many teachers, the ones who did so found they knew what their students knew at the beginning of the course and were thus able to teach much more effectively.

## Plans For The Future

Encouraged by the preliminary results, the National Science Foundation has made another grant to continue the program. The first year had shown that the Illinois Model really worked. But it also showed the staff where problems remain. One of these problems was in the form of the materials the teachers used. As every working teacher knows, materials developed for one's own class are not necessarily useful on a broader scale. They usually need polishing. With National Science Foundation support and a grant from the McDonald's Corporation, two master teachers, Ms. Shirley Mantlo and Ms. Ruth Smith, were given time to make needed improvements in the materials and to systematize their presentation through the use of key economic concepts.

When you have something that works, you want to share it with others, and the three authors are preparing a series of articles in addition to this one which explain various aspects of the project in more detail.

Wisely, the National Science Foundation included in the grant for the second year a sum for evaluation. The project accumulated a vast mass of data which needs to be analyzed in some detail. In addition, more data will be collected during the second year. We will have the opportunity, therefore, to be able to compare and contrast classroom results over a two year period. If we are fortunate, the second year will see the resolution of many of the problems which arose in the first year.

One result does stand out, however--the long standing debate about the propriety of teaching about work in the social studies now has a data base larger than ever before. Those who think that work should not be taught about in the social studies curriculum have to answer the logic and data from this project. In the opinion of many, reasonable objections have been answered.

Teachers of social studies who find themselves with problems might consider the benefits that could stem from including some concepts about work in their teaching. It helps to answer needs for accountability because the learning can be demonstrated with nationally normed pre and posttests. It is relevant and interesting. Students want to learn about jobs and what generates employment and unemployment. In these days of declining social studies enrollments, do we really want others, perhaps less qualified than ourselves, to teach a subject in which social studies has such a rich potential?

Footnotes

[1]"Recently, some new ideas have surfaced, which, if true would tend to explain the disaffection from work of many ghetto young men. These ideas follow from the notions of black culture, or as an alternative explanation, the culture of poverty. Here, the view is that the ghetto man has developed a life-style revolving around norms of autonomy and expressiveness which make repugnant the world of work as it now is. This world is considered 'white, repressive, and stifling' in regard to a style of speech, dress, and language." (Michael Scriven, "The Methodology of Evaluation," Lafayette, Indiana: Social Science Education Consortium, Purdue University, 1974, p. 18.

The project staff was well aware of views such as those expressed above. The materials developed and used by the project generally reflected the dominant viewpoint in the society--that the individual, through education, would come to understand the meanings of work in a sense constructive for himself and the society.

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